

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

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SWITZERLAND

Religious Services Mark Opening of Migration Conference


(Geneva) - An appeal for churchmen and nations to accept and care for the refugees of the world was sounded by Protestant, Jewish and Roman Catholic clergymen at three services in Geneva, just prior to the opening of an emergency conference on "The Refugee Problem - Today and Tomorrow". The conference, which was held on May 27-28 at the Palais des Nations, was sponsored by non-governmental and voluntary agencies in association with the United Nations.

On Sunday evening, May 26, Protestants gathered in the historic Cathedral of St. Pierre and heard sermons by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Dr. Elfan Rees, of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. The Scripture was read by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, M. Auguste Lindt, and the director of ICEM, M. Harold H. Tittmann. Leading the service was Professor Henri d'Espine, president of the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches.

Dr. Visser 't Hooft said that according to the Bible the care of the refugee is one of the elementary duties of man and a criterion of the reality of our faith in the living God. He preached on Isaiah 58: 6-7.

"The question which our nations must face is therefore not can we afford to accept more refugees? Rather, it is can we afford not to accept them? For a denial of human solidarity at this point is a denial of the very basis of these Christian standards which we are called to defend."

There are not many nations which have understood this, Dr. Visser 't Hooft told the congregation. "At the time of a great crisis, such as the Hungarian crisis, our frontiers and our hearts are opened for a time. But we forget so soon. And the victims are those who are waiting for many years in their camps. It is not enough to blame the governments. They can only act if there is among their peoples a great and steady expression of deep concern for the refugees and a willingness to make sacrifices for their sakes."



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Dr. Rees called this the era of greatest human need, but added, "It is certainly the era of greatest human response." Urging a solution to the refugee problem, Dr. Rees stressed the fact that charity was not enough, "care and maintenance no solution to the problems of the refugees".

"It is our duty as churches," he said, "to arouse governments to the necessity of the open door so that we can once again go back to the camps with visas and affidavits in our hands and say to the refugee, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk into a new life'."

The Catholic service was held on May 26 in the Basilica of Notre Dame with Father Henri de Riedmatter as the speaker. On Friday, May 24, Rabbi Alexander Safran was the speaker at the Jewish service.

E.P.S., Geneva

FRANCE

Protestant Rally in Western France

With the general title "To Live in Peace" as guide, 5,000 Protestants from all parts of Western France met in Royan on May 19. (See also EPS No. 20.)

Study groups in parishes of the region had been formed to prepare discussions on Peace with God, Peace in the Church, in the Family, in Manufacture, in the Countryside, in Commerce, and in the Homeland. Emphasis was on the laity. More than half the twenty-six speakers in sessions of the major discussion groups were laity. Four out of seven services of worship were conducted by laymen. The steering committee behind the meeting consisted of four laymen and two pastors.

Continuity with the work of the German Protestant Kirchentag was stressed by the presence of Dr. Reinold von Thadden, the Kirchentag's president. Pastor Georges Casalis, who had been prominent in the Church Rally held last year at his own city, Strasbourg (France), was another leader.

The Royan rally issued a message reading:

"Peace is a miracle. God has made peace with us, His enemies. Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, has reconciled Him with us, His erring children.

"This peace exists for the whole world; it is the secret mainspring of its history; everyone lives by it, even those who know nothing of it.

"We rejoice that we have received the message of peace. In spite of their spiritual poverty, our churches are communities in which peace is given to us that we may learn to live together in reconciliation, welcome and brotherly communion.

"The Holy Communion is the place where the Prince of Peace gathers us around him.

"Peace leads us to his service; we have to pass it on to those who do not know it. We must also serve peace in our family, professional and civic life.

"We know that hatred, division, violence and war will not have the last word; the Prince of Peace is the King of the world.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED KINGDOM

Country-wide Effort Underlines Human Need

Christian aid weeks were launched in May in almost 200 centres throughout Great Britain. At the headquarters of the British Council of Churches in London, maps studded with coloured pins told the story of attempts to bring the work of

HUNGARYReligious Instruction Decree

(Budapest) - A new government decree on religious instruction, which comes into force in Hungary on June 1, confirms that "in accordance with the principle of free practice of religion guaranteed by the constitution, and with the agreement reached between the state and the churches, religious instruction is to be regarded exclusively as the citizen's private affair".

Pupils attending both primary and secondary schools are free to participate in religious instruction or not. This freedom must be respected by all. Parents or guardians "are free to decide whether or not their children shall participate in religious instruction, and no influence is to be exerted upon them". Legal penalties are prescribed for "misuse of religious instruction for political purposes", and influencing decisions about participation or non-participation in religious instruction.

Religious instruction is a voluntary subject outside the compulsory curriculum. If school-rooms are unavailable, the instruction may be given by permission in church buildings. Notice of the date for enrolment must be given in the press, by radio and by school principals. Pupils must enrol within a week after registration for ordinary school instruction. Religious instructors and inspectors are to be appointed by the Church, but with the agreement of the state's Council for Cultural Affairs.

E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED KINGDOMAnglican Stand in South Africa Supported

The Bishops of the Anglican Convocation of Canterbury have expressed "deep sympathy with the Church of the Province of South Africa and all those other Christian churches now engaged in a courageous struggle to preserve inviolate the rights and liberties of the Christian churches to worship together without distinction of race and colour".

The bishops assured "the bishops of the Church of South Africa and all those who work with them" of "constant support and prayers" in their refusal to accept the controversial Native Laws Amendment Bill introduced into the South African parliament.

On the subject of academic freedom the assembled bishops declared that it is "no less essential than religious freedom". They said that, in common with many educational leaders in the United Kingdom, they deplored the threat to academic freedom in South Africa. This latter part of the bishops' pronouncement refers to public proposals for segregated universities in South Africa and the possible resulting differentiation in academic standards.

E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED KINGDOMCongregationalists against H-Bomb Tests

The Assembly of the Congregational Union of Scotland has declared itself "profoundly ashamed that Her Majesty's Government has exploded a nuclear weapon in the megaton range in the Pacific". The Assembly reiterated "its confirmed belief that such tests cannot be supported by the Church of Jesus Christ" and appealed to the British government, "at this late hour, and before we antagonise further the Far East, not to proceed with any further tests". The resolution embodying the protest goes on to say that if British nuclear tests continue, they should "take place in the Atlantic Ocean and not the Pacific".

In London, the Congregational Union of England and Wales passed a resolution asking the British government to try to "reach an agreement with other governments

on the immediate reduction and ultimate abolition of all such weapons" and calling for a postponement of the present series of tests.

E.P.S., Geneva

GERMANY

Rising Interest in Forms of Ecumenical Service Abroad

Increasing concern for extending the idea of social service through the church to include the underdeveloped continents is being expressed in Germany. The Synod of the Church of Berlin-Brandenburg followed a lead given by the Church of Saxony (DDR) and the Church of Westphalia, by deciding to give harvest collections to ecumenical service projects in other parts of the world.

In a speech made at the Berlin Synod, Dr. Christian Berg, leader in Germany's Evangelical Hilfswerk, called the new concept "ecumenical social service" ("Oekumenische Diakonie"). He said that German churches should no longer be mere recipients of gifts from churches abroad through the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

"Christians today all over the world share their joys and difficulties", said Dr. Berg. "The national frontiers of the church are being broken down. We want to do our part in seeing that these barriers are not re-erected." He referred to the importance of helping the young churches in Africa and Asia to build up their work and face their social tasks. He affirmed that "Lazarus lay before our gates" in the form of the misery of neighbouring continents. For this reason, according to Dr. Berg, ecumenical social service was particularly concerned with helping such countries in their period of rapid social change and its resulting disruptions.

Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin and President Lothar Kreyssig of the Church of Magdeburg have also spoken out on the subject. President Kreyssig declared that people in Germany were far from realising their responsibility and must learn to make sacrifices to help underdeveloped countries. He referred to the great collection for the purpose at the Frankfurt Kirchentag in 1956 as a first step in the right direction.

E.P.S., Geneva

GERMANY

Council of EKD Backs Dibelius

(Hamburg) - "The Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has complete confidence in its president, Bishop Dibelius, and knows that this view is shared by the whole Evangelical Church", says a resolution passed unanimously by the Council of the EKD at a meeting in Hamburg. The Council opposed attacks made on the bishop (see EPS No. 15/16) since the meeting of the all-German Synod. Bishop Dibelius is one of the seven presidents of the World Council of Churches.

The EKD's Council also said it was "worried and shocked" to learn of the increasing desecration of cemeteries, and especially of Jewish graves. It asked the churches to do everything in their power to check these alarming tendencies.

Dr. Hermann Kunst, representative of the Council to the Federal Government at Bonn, was instructed to urge the government to allow conscientious objectors to undertake service in "ecumenical camps" as an alternative to military service.

E.P.S., Geneva

NETHERLANDS

World Bible Societies Confer

For the first time the committees and staffs of some of the world's largest Bible Societies met together in Amsterdam from May 23-27 to discuss the world's needs of the Bible and the response of Bible Societies. The Netherlands Minister to

Turkey, Dr. W. Huender, one-time head of the Netherlands Military Mission in Berlin and a former Governor of Surinam, spoke on the pattern of the modern world. Present opportunities were presented by Mr. P. Mahanty for India and Mr. L.B. Greaves for Africa.

The meetings were called by the Netherlands Bible Society, and included Bible Societies which had taken an active part in the formation of the United Bible Societies ten years ago, including the American Bible Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Norwegian Bible Society, the National Bible Society of Scotland, and the host society. The secretary of the Union of German Bible Societies was also present.

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

Sixty guests attended the official welcome on May 18 of Mr. D.H. Rubenstein as the first full-time warden of the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in the Union of South Africa. The service was held in a stone chapel, built by work campers. The ecumenical centre came into being 10 years ago when a small prayer group felt the need of a place where Christians of all persuasions and backgrounds could meet together. At that time the group consisted of six men - an American, an English man, a Frenchman, an Msutu, a South African and a Zulu. The centre is 12 miles from Johannesburg on an abandoned farm.

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The Annual Council of the Fellowship of Reconciliation of Great Britain has condemned the Government for proceeding with nuclear tests. The council, at its annual meeting this month in London, said that "a world which continues to place its trust in such evils is doomed".

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The seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of evangelical Christianity in Guatemala was celebrated on Sunday, May 5, when 40,000 persons marched through the streets of Guatemala City to a huge mass meeting - one of the largest Protestant gatherings ever held in Latin America. The procession, described as unprecedented, filled 70 city blocks. Speaker at the mass meeting in a field provided by the government was Dr. Alfonso Rodriguez of Cuba. He was introduced by President John A. Mackay of Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

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More than 3,000 persons of all races marched through Cape Town, South Africa, on May 18, protesting against the Native Laws Amendment Bill. The Anglican Dean of Cape Town, the Very Rev. T.J. Savage, addressed the throng, saying that "We must protest, and, if necessary, disregard this law. We must obey God rather than man."

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The Congregational Union of England and Wales has adopted a revision of its constitution to embody the principle that "independent churches can and should co-operate, and may delegate certain duties". The preamble to the constitution says that "independence which is isolation and self-sufficiency is sinful".

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Dr. Robert S. Paul, associate director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, Bossey, Switzerland, will become Professor of Church History in the Hartford Theological Seminary, Connecticut, in the summer of 1958.

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Dr. Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the German Federal Republic, has written to Bishop Otto Dibelius to tell him that the Federal Republic will ascertain the extent of work being done on Sundays in the Federal Republic and re-examine legislation on the question. He was responding to a request from the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany. The Chancellor himself expressed concern about the increase of Sunday work in many branches of industry, and emphasised that Sundays and holidays were protected by the Constitution.

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The film "Broken Mask", produced by the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A., has won the first prize in the "Religion and Ethics" category of the fourth annual non-theatrical motion picture contest sponsored by the Film Council of America.

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A Revised Standard Version of the Apocrypha will appear in the United States on September 30. In 1952 the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church asked the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. to undertake the translation of the Apocrypha, and it was authorised by the Council's General Board in December, 1952.

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Professor Jean Daniel Benoit, the well-known expert on Calvin, who is vice-dean of the Theological Faculty of Strasbourg University, has been made a Knight of the French Legion of Honour. The decoration was conferred by the French Ministry of Education.

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Dr. Julius Döpfner, the new Roman Catholic Bishop of East and West Berlin, has instructed clergy and all church workers in his diocese not to make any statements concerning political and other burning problems of the day, if asked to do so by the state authorities. Such statements could be made, he said, only by the German episcopate in the name of the Roman Catholic Church.

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The thirteen-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Abbey of Whitby, England, by St. Hilda was celebrated by an Anglican procession of witness and a service in the ruined Abbey on May 12. The preacher was the Archbishop of York, Dr. Michael Ramsey.

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Church World Service, relief arm of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, has been cited for "outstanding achievement in 1956". CWS was one of five welfare groups to receive the first annual Joseph P. Chamberlain Memorial Award from the New York State Committee on Refugees. Governor Averell Harriman of New York made the presentation to CWS, Catholic Relief Service-National Catholic Welfare Conference, Lutheran Refugee Service, United HIAS Service and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration.

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The draft constitution for the Church of England in Australia and Tasmania (see EPS No. 41, 1955) has now been approved by the needed eighteen of the twenty-five diocesan synods, including the required two Metropolitan sees.

E.P.S., Geneva

